

China pledges peaceful development in Antarctica



Chinese Vice Premier Zhang Gaoli (L) addresses the opening ceremony of the 40th Antarctic Treaty Consultative Meeting (ATCM) in Beijing, capital of China, May 23, 2017. [Photo/Xinhua]

The Chinese government reiterated its commitment to the peaceful development and research of Antarctica as the 40th Antarctic Treaty Consultative Meeting (ATCM) opened in Beijing Tuesday.

This is China's first time hosting the meeting, an annual decision-making mechanism established under the the Antarctic Treaty.

Peaceful, stable, green and sustainable development of Antarctica is in line with the common interests for mankind and a strong commitment to future generations, said Chinese Vice Premier Zhang Gaoli when addressing the opening ceremony.

China acceded to the Antarctic Treaty in 1983 and became a consultative member two years later.

In the past three decades, China has sent nearly 6,000 professionals to Antarctica since the nation dispatched its first Antarctic expedition team in November 1984.

Chinese leaders have stressed on various occasions the need to better protect and research Antarctica due to its special location and environment. To review its progress on Antarctica, China on Monday published the first full report on its study and use of the region over the past 30 years, titled "China's Antarctic Activities."

According to the report by China's State Oceanic Administration, the country has so far opened four research bases – the Great Wall station, Zhongshan station, Kunlun station and Taishan station – and established the Polar Research Institute of China in Shanghai in addition to sailing the icebreaker Xuelong (Snow Dragon).

The number of papers on Antarctic studies published by Chinese scientists and included by the Science Citation Index (SCI) has risen from 19 in 1999 to 157 in 2016, leading China to rank among the top 10 countries.

China has a relatively short history of study in Antarctica, but the progress it has achieved, especially in the past few years, has been huge, said Qin Weijia, director of the Chinese Arctic and Antarctic Administration.

China also raised its financial inputs in Antarctic research. In the past 15 years from 2001 to 2016, China invested 310 million yuan (about 45 million U.S. dollars) in related projects – 18 times the total for the years 1985 to 2000.

Antarctic research has remained one of the most difficult topics due to the lack of research data, said Qin.

China is not yet a global leader in Antarctic research, Qin said, but as the country grows in technology and overall national power, it is willing to contribute more to a better understanding of Antarctica.

China pays close attention to cooperation and sharing of information in the study of Antarctica. The Chinese National Arctic and Antarctic Data Center has provided data for more than 100 international projects and more than 10 countries.

"In past years, China has cooperated with more and more countries in various aspects such as policy making, expeditions and scientific studies," said China's Vice Foreign Minister Liu Zhenmin.

According to "China's Antarctic Activities," from 2016 to 2020, China plans to elevate its Antarctic activities to a higher level, including installing new Antarctic stations and deploying new and advanced icebreakers.

"Down the road, China is willing to join hands with the rest of the international community in understanding, protecting and using Antarctica," said the report.

Some 400 delegates from 44 countries and 10 international organizations which have signed the Antarctic Treaty attended the 40th ATCM in Beijing.